

SEQUOYA REVIEW
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Sequoia Review

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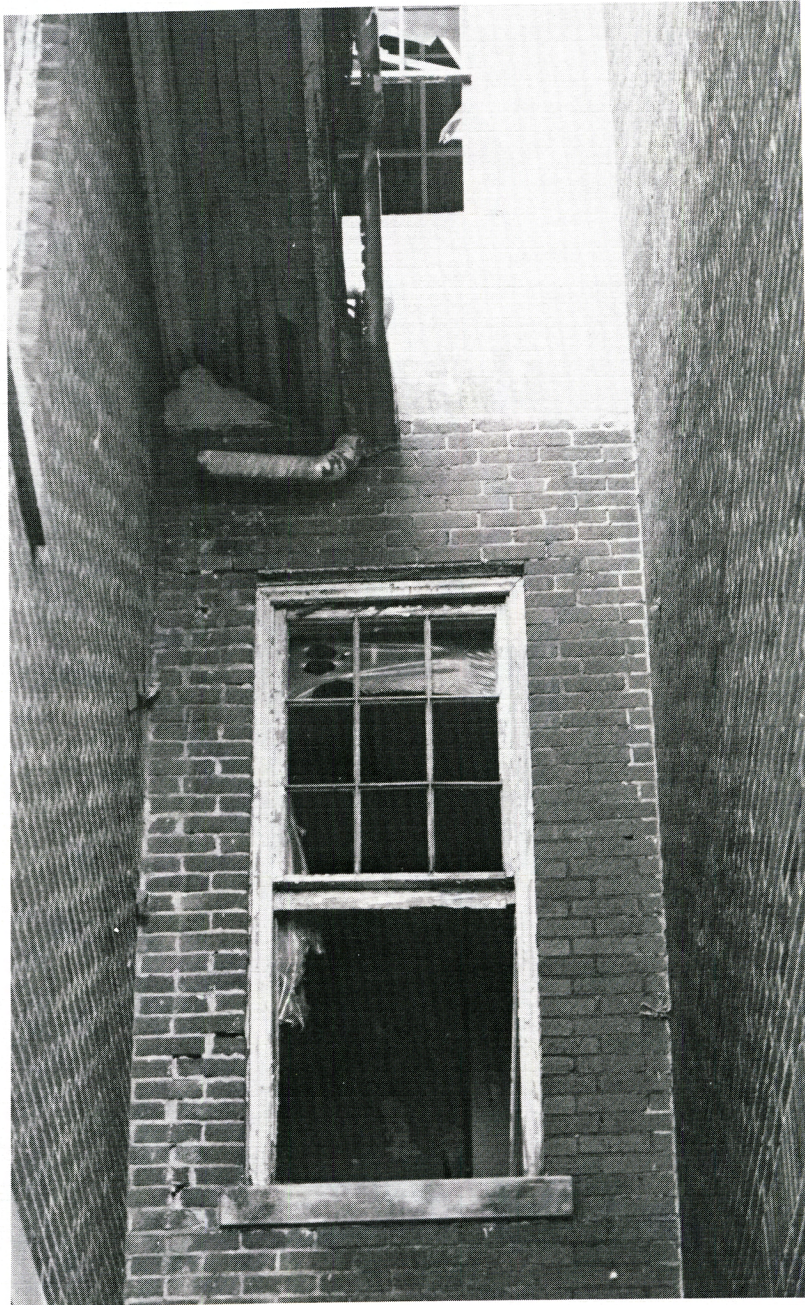


Craig Combs

Prize Winner



Craig Combs



Craig Combs





Kelly McGowan

Gabriel Behringer

Prize Winner

Mi Tio

-God is not nice
He is not an Uncle
He is an Earthquake-
—Old Hassidic Text

The volcano was more than earth and stone, my husband
shivers with bad dreams, my youngest son cries words
and dogs howl chickens, pots crack, rice slides
feverishly into the earth that is most of us our life
Or death: wakened into bad dreams my husband stands
naked shouting out —where are the kids get candles food
No! Stand in the doorway— three months pregnant I see
we are rocks in clay jars shaken out, dark
laundry hanging in the courtyard caving in under earth.

In the church yard I pray for safety from him
whom we offend with our footprints
by walking under his shadow, the cross bears witness
hope, tomorrow glimmers in morning's star chill
someone is lighting a fire to make coffee
is it all we have, I am so tired
blue shadow dogs wrestle with themselves
there is much crying for the dead.

King of the Cats

I was young that sloping afternoon of summer
forming upon the sidewalk
skin of frustrated rhythm
no more able to locate myself within a conversation's lull
than express love with my eyes wide open
or predict the next move in my ascension
from boyhood to man.

I uncovered the King of the Cats
entangled in weeds like a wet plastic bag
the layers of his decay unfolded
from a stomach locked in ants,
and by the purpose of his hot white eye
began to formulate questions I wouldn't ask
until years later, when the chaos of my life
began to coalesce into crisis
that against every natural instinct
demanded my answers.

He is around often
hiding behind tall pine trees
under the edge of a frozen pond
peering through green needles and black branches
covered in snow, it was February
and I suspect him of sliding by windows
leaving claw marks in the frost,
perhaps breathing my dreams, just to taste,
whispering the moon is worth more than a nickel.

I realized that feeling the shape of sorrow
is worse than crying about death, when I got lost
in the marsh one afternoon and found myself
in the backyard of a house I had lived in years before,
and I felt his presence for the last time in a shed
filled with pots, he looked at the shape of the stars
and of myself, revealing a cold I had caught in my heart
from a snake one spring, before a rainstorm.

Haiku

The white geese snubbed by the beaver's
abject preference for solitude, crane their necks
solicitously to the oatmeal clouds
wary, indecisive, smelling of rot
acorns and rain moving along paths
random and dusty, imparting to me
the bewildering impression of going
nowhere at all along the dirt path
bemused by their own haiku.

Victoria Raschke

The Phrenology of Dust Motes

Gustave Hoakenson digs his way through
thousands of ideas for the vending machine
slug detector. At ten feet,
he strikes a solid layer of iridium.
The dinosaurs had fumbled the
\$64,000 Question. Donna Dixon
was not the answer. However, do you think
astrology could have saved them?
Six giant ferns are plastered to the wall
behind him. They too are relics.
When he, my dear Uncle Gustave,
was a child, he found a rat skeleton.
Decay unfathomed by such supple
flesh. He practiced phrenology
on it. Now as marketing escapes him,
ferns don't seem so enormous.
Maybe the dinosaurs didn't vanish,
but faded out, slowly. Sent into oblivion
by numerous, useless inventions.
In placing a small magnet in the chute,
Gustave had saved an industry. His existence,
however, is irrelevant to the past.
Meteorites still would've come for the tricertops,
pterodactyls and giant ferns. Mammals were small
then like rats. Man has outgrown himself.
Slugs have become a menace. Ferns have grown to
ungodly sizes. Gustave wakes in horror sometimes,
knowing that his dreams are too true. His lips look
a little too fleshy, too slick.

Sea Monsters

When I put my hand on your chest
I feel the waves, coarse and full of sand
beating against your ribs.
My ear against your ear. I can hear
the sound of aircraft taking off, bombing
a small village. The sounds of women screaming,
of rice exploding, hard metal on glass,
the sound of sprinkling earth.
Your pulling on her hair. Your screaming in an alien tongue.
She'll help you she says. Through the surgery
the anesthetic holds. You are motionless, shallow
breathing, like death or coma. The bone is shattered
and the bits of marrow dissipate into the wound like dirt.
Joining the sand in the waves, the bombs, the cries.
She doesn't help you. You hide her from me. Hide everything
from me. The scar where the stitches were so uneven.
But you dream about her again and again.
She can see me. See the expression on my face, a reflection.
She is holding your leg. Telling you she's sorry
through your haze. Beside her now, in shadow.
I can almost see the spots of blood
in the hair on your chest. Smell the salt in the waves.

Having Green Tea with God

I feel that I have swallowed enough poetry
to at least lie to you about the darkness
of a plum where I almost poke my nail through,
but the curves are your face and the darkness
is a bruise where the sun has stolen the skin's
ability to renew. The shadows of your lashes
are clawing at the wrinkles beneath your eye
holding them up for now. But your skin
is so pale that it makes the sunlight
dirty on your forehead. I look down
ashamed for peering into that brief moment.
The tea leaves are as frail as
the thin lip of my cup. And I only think
of pressing them to your mouth.
They swirl again and say you are doomed
to be so translucent, so much like
rice paper. You glance at me, revealing
my thoughts for what they are, ignorant
of your meaning. You are already fading
and I am finally seduced by the last
grain of light moving through your hair.
*Have you ever seen the thin, frail bones of a saint
jeweled in glass? They are usually fake.
Once I went to a race track and made a car
explode just for the hell of it.*

Denise Frank

Prize Winner

Shadow Play

Pretending she was her mama, Lilabet pointed her bare toes and stepped carefully along the mossy log. The crumbling rot and papery lichen tickled her feet, and her soft, flimsy, nylon dress beat against her heels. She gathered the layers that bounced before her in her left hand and held them up and away from her toes, clutched them below her tiny breasts. She mustn't trip or lose her flowing rhythm. She must push along with grace and power and cut the air she moved through like Rachael would. No, she shouldn't be looking down to watch her step. She should be looking straight ahead, proud and noble, like a queen. Lilabet came to the end of the log, brought her feet together, and, with a little spring, jumped down to the mossy ground. The moist dirt and moss squished between her toes. Her sudden burst felt good, but it wasn't Rachael. Rachael would have gone on stepping with the same calm grace right off the end of the log, would have gone on without pause, stepping through the summer woods.

Lilabet sighed. Even through pretending she could only be Rachael for snatches. She could soap herself with sandlewood from head to toe, dig through Rachael's closet so thick with that same smell she nearly choked, pull Rachael's most elegant flea market find over her head, wrap a pretty ribbon round her waist so the nylon didn't swim about her, and wish and pretend from dawn to dark, but still she couldn't be her.

She couldn't be anything but the awkward, shy thirteen-year-old that she was. Perhaps she would have settled for being Rachael's child if that had been an option, but Rachael had ceased treating her like her child long ago. Lilabet tried to remember when. It must have been the same year they last moved, the same year Lilabet's bed became a high swinging bunk on the back porch, well, not a porch really, but a back storage closet that somebody had screened in, a porch that was on the opposite end of the house from Rachael's room. When Lilabet lay in her swinging bunk at night, so close with nothing but a screen between her and the bamboo that grew high all around the house, she felt filled with the music of the tree frogs. She tried to focus on the frogs and to blot out the putrid smells from the broken sewer line running half way back across the yard. If she turned on her side, she could see the black silhouettes of the lovely tree shapes that bounded the yard and, beyond them, the pinpoints of tiny stars. The stars and the frogs made up for a lot, made up for the smells nearly, and lulled Lilabet to sleep like Rachael used to do. Rachael used to sing hush to her—she was going to buy her a mocking bird

and all kinds of other fantastic things, but, of course, she never did.

Rachael never had any money. And Lilabet was too young when that state began to remember anything different. All Lilabet knew was that Rachael had always managed. Rachael lived on food stamps and fifty dollars child support a month, but she brought home crates of cabbage the grocer was throwing out, and day-old bread or doughnuts, and baked potatoes by the dozen that were left out at night behind the Sizzlin' Steak. Rachael always had enough to feed her men friends and Lilabet too.

Lilabet knew, from having heard Rachael tell the story many times, that she had an older brother but Lilabet couldn't even remember him. Rachael used to hold Lilabet when she was just a little thing and say, "At least I got you, baby. At least I got you." Lilabet wondered how a mama could give up a four-year-old son just because it made sense for her and her old man to divide the kids up evenly when they split, so no one would have too much burden. Rachael was like that—always more full of sense than heart—but try as she might, Lilabet couldn't picture giving up a son and walking calmly out like Rachael did with just her baby daughter.

Lilabet remembered waking as a toddler to strange noises coming from her mama's room. Grunts and moans and giggles and screams and noises that Lilabet couldn't even describe. The noises didn't happen every morning. Just sometimes. Once, way back before Lilabet even started school, she asked her mama why she made all those noises in the morning, and Rachael and the man sitting with her across the breakfast table looked at each other and laughed. Rachael said, "It's just something grown-ups do, little one."

Some time after that Rachael bought Lilabet a child's story book that had pictures of a big pink fat man and an even fatter pink woman and showed them, all twisted together with no clothes on, in a big white bed. The words said, "Mr. Fat and Mrs. Fat like to roll and bounce and wiggle together on their bed. All the rolling about makes them feel like they are getting tickled on the inside and it makes them very happy."

Lilabet suspected that the story was her mama's way of explaining the odd noises, but try as she might, she couldn't picture her mama, or any of the men who visited, naked. When she was little Lilabet used to try to drown out the noises from her mama's room by crowing like a rooster in the mornings. She would wake up and she would crow and crow until the noises from her mama's room would stop and her mama would come and gather her up and stroke her hair and kiss her forehead and tell her to put on her slippers and come to breakfast.

According to Rachael, sometime before first grade Lilabet stopped calling Rachael "Mama" and started calling her "Rachael" like everyone else. Rachael was glad,

Lilabet thought, for Rachael always told the fact like she was bragging.

When Lilabet was older, say eight or nine, she learned that Rachael used to model naked for a famous New York painter named Raphael Soyer. After that whenever Lilabet came across a new encyclopedia set, like when they moved and she changed schools and discovered at its library a new set or two, she would look up “Soyer” and “painting” in the encyclopedias and search for pictures by Mr. Raphael, but she never found any. It wasn’t until last month when a greasy, fat, balding friend of Rachael’s came one day to their little wooden frame house with his black camera and a tripod and took pictures of Rachael “in the nude,” they called it, that Lilabet saw Rachael that way herself.

Holding her white blonde hair atop her head like a majestic crown, Rachael stood tall and sinewy against the yellowed lace curtains in the front room. Silhouetted against the light, her full breasts hung heavy and low. Or Rachael squatted like a primitive and faced the camera dead-on. Lilabet could see that Rachael was not afraid. Rachael had grown up in Flemish Harlem and she was not afraid of anything at all.

Lilabet wished she could be like Rachael but she was not. Lilabet found the world a rather frightening place. She often mimicked Rachael and put on an air of confidence, but inside she was not sure of anything. Lilabet wondered if this was because no man had ever touched her like they touched Rachael, if that was why she was so shy and scared. She might be curious about the things that happened in Rachael’s bedroom but she was afraid of them as well. She could see how good Rachael felt when she came out the door and she wanted to feel good too, but at the same time she wanted to protect herself. She wanted to save herself for someone very special.

In a sense Lilabet thought that Rachael must be saving herself, too, because Rachael never got remarried. When a man would stay around for a while, Rachael would often act all lovey-eyed and, when the man was visiting, wait on him hand and foot, bring him tea or coffee to sip in bed, and cling to his arm when the two of them went out the door and left Lilabet alone. But Rachael never invited a one of the men to move in. Whenever she got to considering such a thing must have been when she would corner Lilabet. Lilabet might be in the big green chair Rachael had pulled from a trash pile across the alley, she might be embroidering her denim or painting hearts on her tennies, when Rachael would look up from her covered mattress on the floor that served as a sofa and ask, “Well, Lilabet, what do you think? Should I marry him?” Lilabet would pause and cock her head and give her honest opinion, always saying no. “No. He’s too snobby.” Or “no, too lazy.” Or “no, too cocky.” Or “I just don’t like him very much.”

Rachael would laugh and say, “You’re right, Lilabet. As usual you’re right on the mark.”

Lilabet could tell that Rachael wasn't serious about the fat photographer but she asked her opinion anyway, and so she gave it. "You can't marry him. That man's a plain old nerd."

Lilabet was happy. She was sitting beside Rachael in the front seat of a car Rachael had borrowed from a friend. The wind was blowing Lilabet's long hair away from her face. She stuck her right arm out the window and let the wind hold it like a sail. She liked the feel of that gentle force and how it buffeted and held her. When she looked at Rachael the sun was beyond her, cutting a white edge of light to her profile that faced the road. Rachael is beautiful, she thought, and I'm glad to be her daughter. Going through the world with her is like an adventure that is always safe.

"Let's take a vacation together, baby," Rachael had said. "Just the two of us." And now here they were—out in a strange wilderness, unlike any place Lilabet had ever seen. The swamp lands of south Florida rushed past. Miles of mucked water and, growing right in the middle of it, scattered half-bare trees—reaching, lonely and desperate, for the sky. The scene was eerie and Lilabet loved it. It made her think of the landscapes in the dinosaur books she used to read. She and Rachael were moving back in time together, moving back to the beginning of all things. They would stand there together holding hands and Lilabet would remember that Rachael was her mama, and Rachael would remember that Lilabet was still her little girl.

Lilabet was so lost in thought she did not see the hitchhiker until Rachael stopped.

"Watcha doing?" Lilabet asked.

"There's a young man that needs our help," Rachael said and Lilabet looked through the back window and saw a honey-blond man, boy almost, running towards them. He was bent under a huge knapsack and as he ran, his heavy army-jacket pockets beat against his hips on either side.

"Open the door," said Rachael, and Lilabet turned about onto her knees and jerked the back door open. The young man swung inside. His eyes were wide and innocent and vigorous and excited from the run. He stared at Lilabet and she felt his pale-blue eyes burn into her. He was a bony handsome.

He shifted his look to Rachael. "Thanks," he said and he slid out of his backpack and settled against the seat.

Lilabet wanted to smile at the boy before she turned back around, but she was reluctant to let go the smile which she thought might get too big and make her look a fool, so she didn't. She looked up and saw Rachael beaming at the boy through her rear view mirror.

"Where you heading?" Rachael asked.

“I finished the Georgia end of the Appalachian Trail last month,” said the boy, “and I decided to keep on going south to see the Everglades. Land like this is something I’ve never seen.”

Lilabet wanted to look at the boy. She pictured him staring out the window now. His voice was confident and relaxed, easy, like he and Rachael were not strangers at all but old-time friends. Rachael talked back to the boy in just the same sort of way.

In fact, while they drove to the camp site it was really Rachael who kept the conversation moving. Lilabet could tell the boy was not the talkative type, but more inclined to sit and muse, to stare out windows and think about what was going by. Rachael, however, kept drawing the boy out. She was quite the talker, but never about herself. She always played to men, but it irked Lilabet to see Rachael doing so when this boy was half her age. He probably doesn’t even like it, Lilabet thought. He can probably see right through Rachael’s little games. A boy like him, a natural, has no use for such gushing. Lilabet glanced at the boy occasionally, but mostly she looked straight ahead and imagined the boy looking straight ahead also and trying to block out Rachael’s commandeering voice, so he could focus on Lilabet’s white-blond hair. It was much longer than Rachael’s and much finer and silkier. It was the one place Lilabet was sure she had Rachael beat.

When they got to the camp site Rachael got the boy to pitch the tent for her and when he finished she thanked him by touching his arm softly with her long fingers and looking gratefully into his serious eyes.

Rachael was trying too hard for this boy who could not be hers, Lilabet thought. He’s hardly older than my brother would be. Was that why Rachael had lost her normal common sense? Did she still miss the boy she’d tossed aside but have things all mixed up? Forgot she’d be his mama and not his girl? For the first time in her life Lilabet felt sorry for Rachael and confident she could outdo her. It wasn’t necessary, after all, to do much—just cast her eyes the boy’s way sometimes like she was doing and the boy knew. Lilabet was sure her eyes said more than all Rachael’s fancy words and overly seductive looks. Her eyes were pure and direct and honest and packed with feeling. Now and then the boy would shoot the same eyes back at her and Lilabet was not one bit afraid.

After a while Rachael said She needed to go down to the camp store and pick up a few things for supper. She asked the boy if he would like to come along. Lilabet flashed her eyes quickly at him. No, they begged.

“I think I’d better stay and tend the fire,” said the boy and Rachael, who never in her life begged anyone, just smiled at the boy and turned and left.

Lilabet sat watching the boy poke at the fire with a long stick. Little sparks of light

danced crazily up from wherever he poked. Lilabet felt like the stick was poking her and wherever it touched she opened and danced outward and upward like the sparks. After a while the boy came over to the picnic table bench where Lilabet sat.

"How old are you?" he said.

"Thirteen," said Lilabet, wishing she could bring herself to lie.

The boy threw one leg over the bench and sat facing her. Up close like this Lilabet could see the lean boniness that made his face so handsome.

"You ever arm-wrestle?" he said.

"Not much."

"Well, I'll take you on," said the boy and he laid his right arm across the table, his hand open wide for hers. Lilabet feared her trembling would show as she reached to meet his grasp. The boy lifted her hand up, and their elbows and clasped hands made a triangle along the table's edge.

Lilabet leaned over to see what the world looked like through that triangle and it was milky black and rich with stars. The sound of tree frogs filled her ears and she felt very happy. She looked back at the boy and wondered if her happiness showed.

Though she used every ounce of strength she had, three times in a row the boy beat her at wrestling. After the third try Lilabet let her hand go limp under the boy's. She felt it sandwiched between the cool, damp table wood and his warm, smooth flesh. "I guess I'm not much of a challenge," she said.

The boy stared intently at her. "Who wants to arm-wrestle anyway?" he said. Then he kept his hand right where it was on top of hers and kept on looking at her, looking into her really, and Lilabet felt herself opening up again and sparking like the fire. The boy moved his hand easy and slow atop her open palm and she couldn't believe how important those little motions were and the sound of the tree frogs dropped away and the stars too and she was only aware of the boy's eyes and his little motions. Now he was giving her hand little squeezes and her hand felt limp and willing to take any shape, willing to jump to him. And he clutched it suddenly very tightly and she clutched back like she belonged to this boy and could hold onto him forever.

They heard Rachael's car approaching at the same time. Lilabet saw the good-bye look in the boy's eyes, but he didn't move his hand away until the car lights flashed through the green tent and sent a haze of murky light their way, a haze that could hardly hold its own against the dancing, golden light of the fire.

After a supper of corn and potatoes which Lilabet had buttered and Rachael had wrapped in foil and thrown onto the embers, the boy got the fire going again and the three of them sat about it. By now the frogs had hushed and the Everglades was a silent

blackness all around them. They were all quieter, even Rachael, who spoke occasionally to the boy in soft, hushed, throaty tones. Lilabet didn't care. Every time the boy spoke to Rachael she was sure he was really speaking to her—sending her little private, coded messages. Rachael and the boy sat rather close but Lilabet was sure the boy's spirit was across the fire with her. When she looked at him she couldn't see his eyes, but he seemed to look her way. Orange light and shadows from the fire danced across his features like a celebration.

When the fire began to die Rachael stretched her arms way back over her head, arching her back and moving slow like a cat. "I guess it's about bedtime," she said. "Lilabet, you go on in and dress down first."

Lilabet didn't budge. "It's so pretty out here," she said.

"Go on, now," said Rachael. "I'll be along in a few minutes."

Lilabet got the flashlight from the table and stepped across the darkness with it toward the tent. When she opened the flap and went inside the light bounced around in the blackness. The corner of her blue sleeping bag lay pushed up against the right wall of the tent. Her bundle of clothes was just beside it. Way on over to the left of the tent the light illuminated something odd—not Rachael's green sleeping bag but a bright red plaid Lilabet could at first not identify. She swung the light over the expanse of red. It was huge. Oh, of course. It was the inside of Rachael's bag. Rachael must have zipped it all the way open and spread it out double. Across its foot the boy's bag lay folded horizontally.

Lilabet went cold. No, she said to herself. God, please don't let it be. She stood motionless. She wanted to grab up Rachael's bag and throw it out the door, but she moved instead to her bundle and eased out of her heavy clothes and into her flannel gown. She sat down and pulled on a clean pair of socks. Then she switched the light off and crawled and reached across the blackness until she felt the boy's bag. She dragged it across the tent floor to the big space between Rachael's bed and hers. The bag hissed as it scraped the floor. Then Lilabet inched back to her own bag and slid her legs into it and scooted down inside. Her gown rode up her thighs and climbed her hips and she let it stay there.

"I'm ready whenever you are, Rachael," she called out across the blackness.

But no one answered—neither Rachael nor the boy, nor the silent, muggy darkness of the glades.

Lilabet waited in the black but Rachael did not come and Lilabet knew then that Rachael was waiting with the boy for her to fall asleep. She's acting as if I'm a child who can be tucked away and gotten rid of when not convenient, thought Lilabet. She lay furious in the dark and wide awake. The boy wants me, she told herself. Rachael is

making herself into an old fool. That boy does not need her. He will get away and take his bag outside to sleep. Or perhaps lie down between us and hold my hand. We will dream of each other through the night. Lilabet lay consumed with the boy and with her anger at Rachael. More than an hour had passed, she was sure, but she would not sleep. She would lie awake all night if need be.

They came without a flashlight, but Lilabet heard footsteps and whispers at the tent and saw them anyway when the flap opened. She saw them silhouetted against the grey night sky. They were holding hands and Rachael was leading the way.

Then the flap fell shut and Lilabet could see nothing. But she smelled sandalwood and woodsmoke, and heard them settle. For a bit all was quiet. Lilabet strained but she couldn't hear a thing, not even the little smacking sound that kissing lips make. Lilabet let go the tension that had racked her body. Perhaps, after all, she could sleep.

Then Rachael let out a tiny throaty moan. It was so soft and quiet, Lilabet thought she imagined it. She listened to the blackness and, after a pause, there came another, and then another fast upon it. It was like a purr barely whispered, but it screamed in Lilabet's ears. She tried to blot out the little moans, but she could not. Soon there was the sound of motion, the scraping of weight in little movements across the cloth floor and the barely audible thump of fleshy bone against fleshy bone. The sounds went on and on. They wouldn't stop. Then came little breaths, fast at first, then faster and faster still. And the mugginess of the air pressed down around Lilabet with a fishy, heavy smell.

She pictured Mr. and Mrs. Fat rolling on their cartoon bed and grinning. Like being tickled inside, she thought and she kicked her legs straight and hard against the foot of her bag, and ground her fist into the tent floor, and with all her might hated Rachael and the boy. She thought it would be better if the hitchhiker had beaten and robbed them. Anything was better than being betrayed by your own mama.

After Lilabet and Rachael had been home a few days the fat photographer stopped by one night and Rachael made him tea.

"The pictures came out fantastic," he said and he spread a bunch of glossies on the kitchen table. Rachael flipped through the pictures, passing them one at a time to Lilabet. The man must have squatted down often and pointed up, for her naked mama looked like a carved icon, a tree, a powerful goddess rising above the world.

"Thanks," he said and Rachael smiled graciously. Lilabet watched her mama's face. To Rachael the man was a toy, just like the others, just like the beautiful hitchhiker boy. Lilabet's new hate for her mama flared bright.

"I have a big favor to ask," said the man. "It's important for my work." His big oily hands fingered the slick surface of his china cup .

“You know I always assist my friends when I can,” said Rachael. And she sipped her tea and looked across to the man through the wispy steam that played across her face.

“What I want to do next,” said the man, “is photograph your daughter. Photograph Lilabet.” Lilabet glanced back at the man. His greasy smile was fixed upon her. She wished his teeth were not so old and yellow.

Rachael put down her tea. “I don’t know,” she said. “She’s a bit young.”

The man turned back to Rachael. “She doesn’t have to do nudes. She’s a classic beauty even dressed.”

Lilabet watched Rachael’s eyes flash jealous for just an instant and then they filled with a mother’s pride. “Of course she is.” Rachael gently patted Lilabet’s hand that lay on the table. “But I don’t think she’d be interested.”

Lilabet jerked her hand out from under Rachael’s. “Oh, yes I would,” she said. “I think it’d be fun.”

The day was beautiful and sunny and the sky bluer than the hitchhiker’s eyes when the photographer bundled Lilabet off to his big A-frame house nestled acres back into the north Florida brambly woods. As they pulled up to the house in the middle of that expanse Lilabet realized that, next to Rachael, the man was extremely rich.

The man came around and opened the door for Lilabet and she stepped out of the car. True to her mama’s style Lilabet had worn Rachael’s favorite “hippy” attire, a paisley skirt that hung down to her ankles, a blue silk blouse that clung nicely to her blossoming form, and a half-a-dozen strands of baubles—clay and glass beads, cork, and woven knots of hair on leather. Lilabet’s long, silky-white hair was clean and light. The breeze tossed it about as she moved across the man’s front yard.

“Go sit by the stream,” he said, so Lilabet sat where he indicated on a big smooth rock. She leaned back and smiled and the man clicked his camera. Lilabet leaned forward and her hair fell across her eyes. The man moved around her hair and up close to her face and clicked.

“It’s hot,” he said. “Why don’t you let your feet enjoy the water?”

Lilabet loosened her saddles and eased her feet into the cool wetness. She hiked her skirt up so it would not drag the water. The man stepped over the little stream and squatted on the other side and pointed his camera. He was so low Lilabet wondered if he could see up her gathered skirt, but she didn’t worry much about it. Imagining that he could made her feel important and grown up, and seemed like a sort of weird and wicked fun. I’m becoming a woman, she thought. I’m becoming a woman as beautiful as Rachael.

The man snapped the camera two or three times. "Get a little wet," he said.

Lilabet reached down and scooped up the cool water and splashed her face. She laughed. Then she splashed herself again. The water dribbled down her shirt and crawled like a tiny cold snake across one breast. She looked down. Her blue silk was streaked with dark wetness now and clung to her even more. She could see the little rise of her two small nipples through it.

"Perfect," said the man and without taking off his shoes he stepped right into the stream and pushed the camera toward her chest and tilted up. After three or four shots he stopped.

"Go stand behind that oak," he said, "and I'll put your shoes inside so they won't get lost."

When the man came back out he told her to grab the tree and swing around from behind it. The man took a lot of shots, moving in close. He grinned. He was sweating in the sun. Little beads of sweat glistened on the top of his balding, greasy head and rolled forward toward his bushy, black brows. He took a dirty hanky from his pocket and wiped his forehead.

"You're the perfect wood nymph," he said and he stood there without shooting for a moment like just looking at her was very special. "Would you mind just opening your blouse?"

Lilabet was not surprised. This is what grown-ups do, she thought. I do not really like this man at all, but this is what grown-ups do and I am growing up. It is important to him and I am ready. Lilabet reached down to the first button, but her hands trembled so the button stuck.

The man moved forward through the brush. He let his camera fall from the strap across his shoulder. "Let me help you," he said.

The man pushed his fat, soft hands against her and undid all the buttons. Then he peeled the blouse away.

Lilabet couldn't look down at herself, but she felt the cool breeze across her bare breasts and open back. She felt her nipples stiffening and she saw the man lift his camera and heard it click and click.

"Hug the tree," said the man.

Lilabet hugged and the man shot again. Lilabet felt very strange. She couldn't explain what she felt. She was not in love. She almost hated this man, but standing in front of him like this felt good.

"Drop your skirt," said the man.

Lilabet looked into his eyes. They were commanding her.

“It’s okay, honey,” he said. “You’re hid behind that bush. Drop your skirt and panties too. Then when you feel ready, climb into the tree. I won’t look till you’re up there, ready.” The man’s eyes were pleading now.

When Lilabet climbed naked into the tree, she thought how strange it is to be a grown-up. The breeze played all around her. She had never felt more alive in her life. She didn’t need Rachael’s clothes. She was beautiful on her own. She was not a queen like Rachael, but Rachael couldn’t scramble up a tree. Rachael wasn’t her. From here on out she would show Rachael who her daughter really was.

She climbed until she reached the highest branches. She felt the sun beat upon her shoulders and her breasts. She looked down. The man looked very small and unimportant. He sat slump shouldered and turned away.

“I’m ready,” she called out.

The man swiveled around. “Too high up,” he said.

But Lilabet didn’t listen. She leaned against the rough, thick trunk. She felt whole and free and touched all over by the sky. She looked down at her little round breasts and her small, smooth tummy. She saw that her skin was as white in the sun as her white-blond hair. She looked down at herself and was glad.

Bradley O. Paul

**Promise Made to Jane Standing
In the Doorway of our Home, the Night an Ocean
of Lit Pipes, a Pipe in my Hand. Red-Handed.**

I have completely renounced my days as a devil,
no more zipping around on the Harley Davidson of Destiny,
no more toying with the neighbor's wife.

The cackling screendoors I call reefer monkeys.
They have words like a god. Not that a god
is a man, but those doors like to laugh!

And I laugh too: The leaves wiggling from the grey mesh
of sky are the freakeries in search of song. Their palms
do not flash the usual razamatazz,

but the day stretches out from them.
It is beautiful but huge when it becomes darkness,
when it falls like a net across us.

Chokeweed

The chokeweed is a symbol
of glory against The Man,
where (a) glory is understood to be
a sucker punch to the failing eyes
of the angels, and (b) The Man

is the abstracted composite of
(b1) stated angelic vision and
(b2) the unrealized fear of such myopic givens.
Chokeweed is a variable conditional upon

its appropriateness to the system:
a plant *chokeweed* does not, in fact,
exist, but the milk
of its imagined snapping,

the thorns devoid of any poison,
serve us well. Its blossom, however,
is ridiculous: it spits, and chokes on this spit—
hence the name of the plant as a whole— and so
is worthless, and should be excluded.

What to Say

Let them know that the devil and ninepence go with her.
That the king died from _____.
Let them know that this is different from nothing,
at least on this side of Jordan. That there are flowers who say
“I was mowed, I will bloom again,” they pore over
their glassy seeds, there among the grass,
that in the end they listen to a great symphony of fields
and grow up past the pepper roots, past the grasshopper inside
a grasshopper, the twitching raspberries, past
the wind among the bowls, the lights, the chalkbirds singing
of their dusty stomachs, the angels spinning along the edge of a glass
the blue light of dawn in their mouths, the throes from the deep purple
stomach of a star, into
the new heaven of heavens of sunsongs of stonestorms and sunmice
and shillyshally and shackpappy and burgoo-maroon-patére and fat horns unfolding
from out the dusty wings of the dying eaves, unfolding and unfolding and unfolding
—let them know that it exploded —
that it brought forth a tiny voice.

Ted Howard

This Sweet Onion

The onion's sheer browns to yellows
and green brittle first layer misleads us
about its bulbous inner life, the never
ending sweet pulp to the core. Enough

So that by returning it to the brown
earth we give it back to the home
it was stolen from. At least
let me rot here in the dirt!

There are matches, a lighter, a pack
of cigarettes and a bribe in my pocket.
The spaces between slats of the dock
reveal living water below me.

The galaxy's reflection pulls
itself around in the lake
by the force of this sweet onion.
I am a turnstile it says, sweeping

bubbles to the side like a circular
spinning brush, arms scraping
the shores. An effigy of myself
I sit on this shelf serving no one.

Together with the Afro American Smithsonian Curator

We talk King DuBois puzzles and games
like his chessboard jigsaw ready for assembly
(with no field
how can we battle?) Out open balcony
doors Mozart's Requiem
conducted by this black Einstein
to regulars outside

hairs
wisp from pale brown
scalp like Lithium strands undefined
by any eye A gyro of optical bits the CD
spins in its rack His new medium
of art involves light is all he told me

Backgrounded by an iron shackled
yard ether jazz
above the sidewalk K street rock star mostly weathered
like his city porn house shackled
between 7 eleven and K street garage
highly glamorized, ask him for proof
one tug on a single chord around his neck
will bring your curiosity around. It looks just
like quartz.

Down the street crossing the extension
of the Capitol's southern cross-hatch
the FDA and Jefferson Memorial Jeremy
begins his journey beneath the Potomac
he will escape pushing under unnoticed
tons of water
as if it were air, Jeremy
is a mole. Above from the peak
of the Washington Monument we see NW and SW
are blacked out right now A blackout
is consequent to mismanaging energy
and so is the man walking
down from H to G his name
begins with neither of these though
holding his cup with the stub

of a right arm against
the scarred skin of his chest walking
too quickly for money but enough
to be noticed

The subway is always quiet here and like a train
passing for a moment so
are any sirens tempting no one
to come and see for themselves The escalator
breaks from the ground onto the horizon of *Imagine*
we hear sung by a young man in sandals
don't ask for his name it's as complicated
as the coins scattered along the bottom
of his guitar case His pregnant
wife hands out vegetarian sandwiches at LaFayette
Park every Tuesday, but it's not Tuesday
a man fights his dead brother
in the alley on Tuesday Right now
Blues rise from very old tunnels
like ozone heat pulls wavy away
from asphalt we sit and listen

Several Post-Apocalyptic Jewels

Your father is impolite even
to sparrows you say, a bubonic
man if there ever was.

Tambourine click
click of our heels shadows
march following.

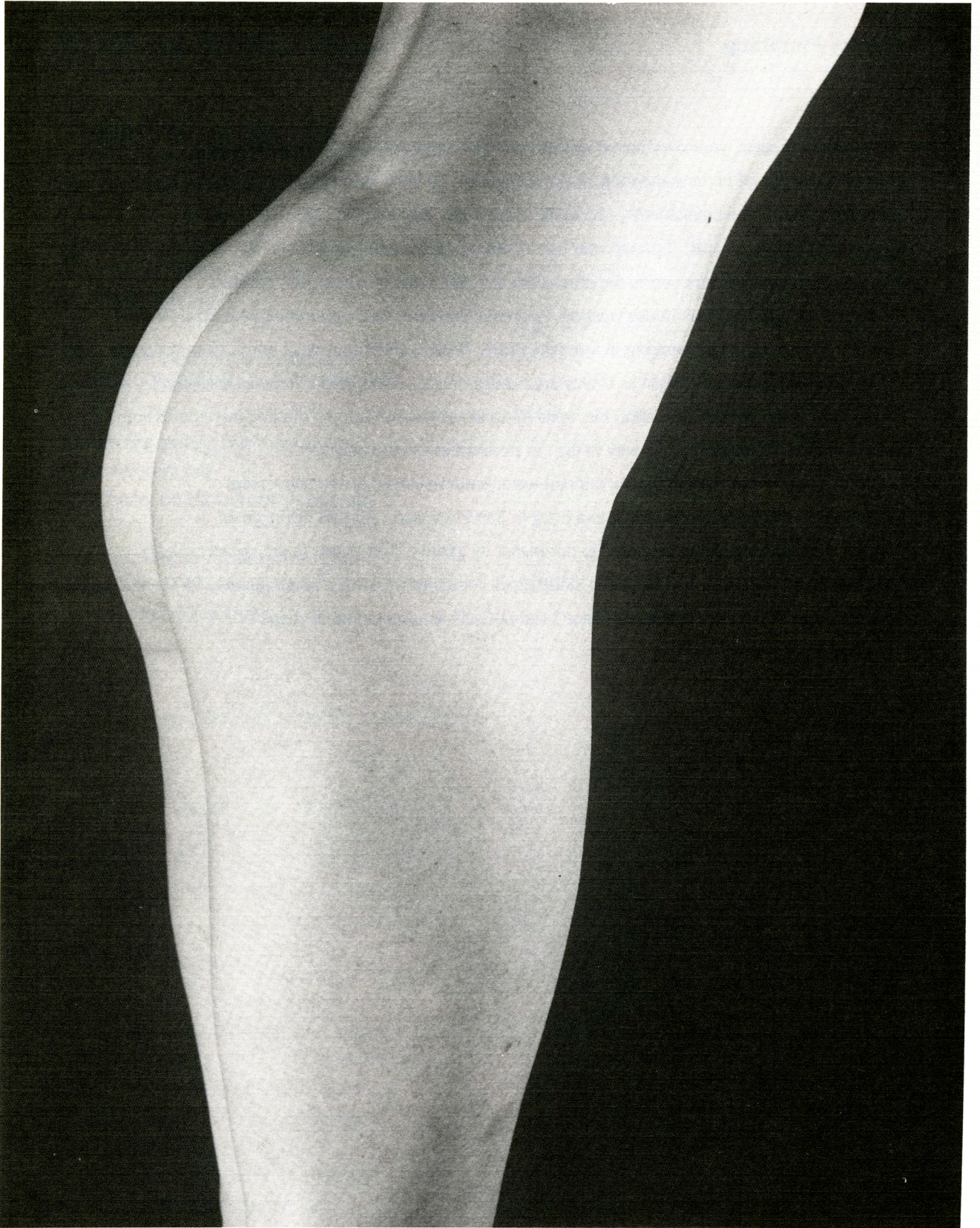
They play cadenza's hammered
out like oiled doves.

Above the peregrine's sadness,
what we can see
from here, chalky smooth pastels.

And the plague, death mounted
in the rafters, is merely this
the walk across a river.

Faulty Plumbing

To all leaky faucets, your overlooked spicatto compact spikes of sound, an orchestration that would if put all in the same room shake the world. To slow leakers, gushers, and the latest in technological pipe breakdown— Lead the cacophonous way into the night like so many revolutionary instruments! I praise your use of water as a fractured Buddhist river. Beyond the staggerings of glaciers you're the closest ice has ever come to voicing an opinion. It deserts us with help from loose washers, excessive pressure, faulty plumbing in general. During the day like metallic bats hanging in arrogant stasis, hooked silver faucets at our kitchen windows in broad lead-poisoned daylight as if they are exhibitionists. At night like freemasons locked away collecting secret handshakes, like nuns in timid submission forcing out one tiny confession after another. It has worked its way to the top from ocean mantle into streets of New York. From Alps to plastic mineral water bottles shelved at any convenient store. From the dredges of Atlantis to a bong in San Francisco. All part of the great family that has been safely anchored to our planet by gravity, like pearls in air, water has had no need to escape. But young stolid pipes overcome yesterday's frail metals, PVC prevents rust, no longer furthering water's right of self-determination, to shape our bodies in its image.



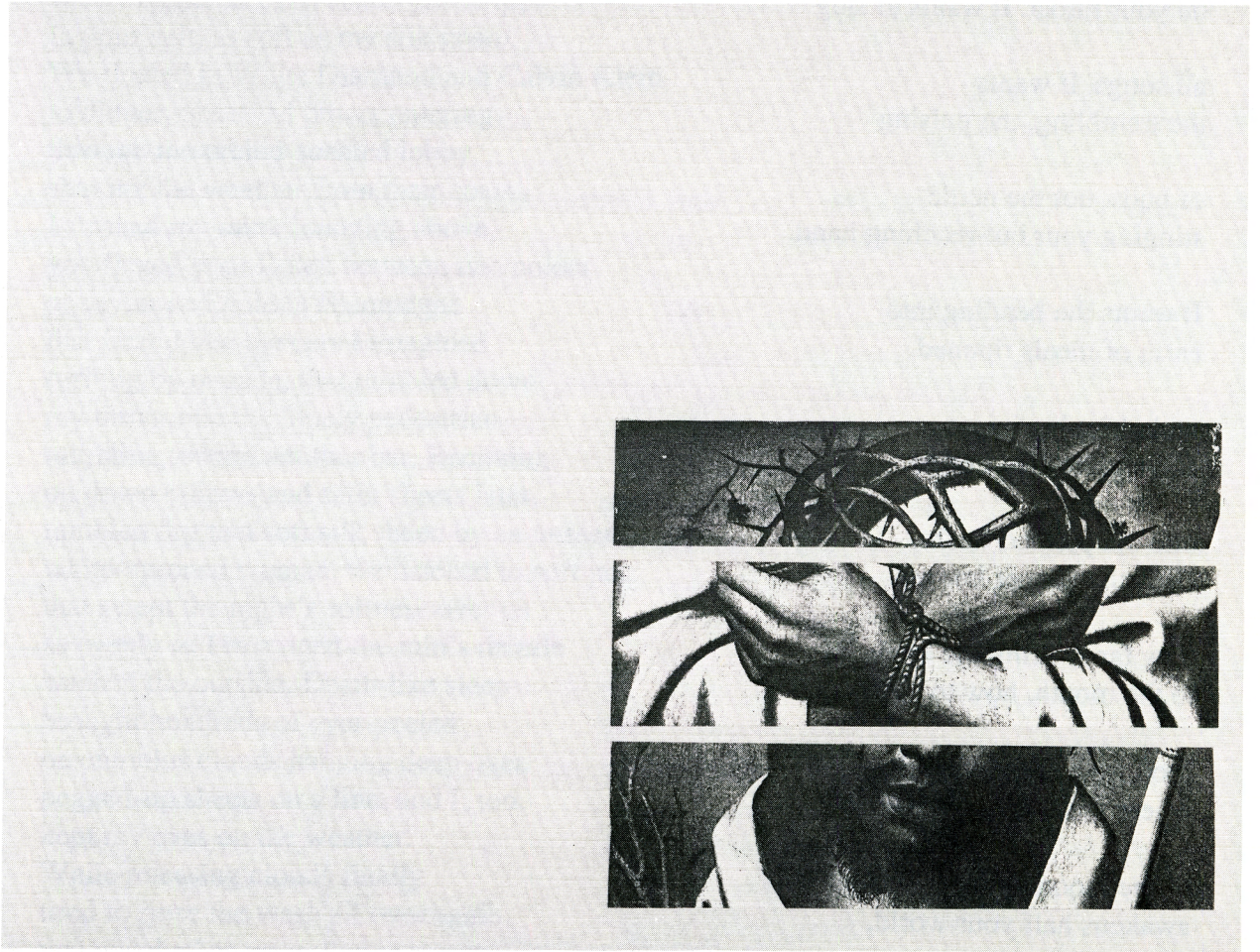
Terry Harwood



Terry Harwood



John Van Eyk



Michael Kim

Helga Kidder

From One World To Another

At night the day's blade sits
on your throat. It wants to sing

all songs. It wants
the trembling, the pulsing

of buds, not the nettle
stinging your out-reaching hand.

It wants the bending into
earth of meals ripened

with dripping juices
and a knife half-curved

into the pierced flesh.
Only the farmer knows

how far to bring the knife
to the mouth, how to glean

food from the blade this night,
where the scarcest whisper

of the moon to the sun
awakens half your world.

As If On Top of the World,

I tried to forget the weather,
drew drapes on the billboard claiming
HAVE FUN IN THE SUN and finely
drizzled rain washing the scene.
This room, you said, was our island
with weather as even as the pin-stripes
in your suit, as soft as my silk gown.
We floated in White Diamond and Calvin Klein
to dinner, observed others entering
through the orchid-scented lobby,
shaking the weather from their coats.
I stroked my mink lounging above,
you flexed your Rolex between two colors
of caviar and golden champagne
that fizzed like the cars I imagined
rushing by outside, that tumbled down
my throat like the lonely pedestrian
tumbling toward another bar. Reclining
on down pillows and satin sheets later,
tumbled dry to a soft silk sheen by an unseen
white-aproned woman, we listened to soft jazz
that swept the night's softness over us
as evenly as I imagined the rain's drizzle
washed the outside. Death-like sleep
brought hundreds of eyes peeled
on cumulus clouds hanging deep over
pegged-up sheets on a line, and I, too,
kept my eyes on the weather.
While releasing clouds finally
tried to rinse the wash all over again,
you watched as we pulled in sheets
in rhythm like natives pulling in
a fishing line hanging deep
with caught fish. We draped radiators.
lamps, chairs, even doorknobs,
until they covered the whole room.
When I awoke to the morning's bluest sky
and schools of clouds warming
in the sun's light and the beach beyond

so purified as if washed by well-meaning gods
over night, I claimed this island scene
from across the opened window like a piece
of linen taken from the clothesline.
I brought it inside for you and for me
with its sun, the clouds, the fresh air,
the happily smiling couple.

Plea of "Too Pink to Keep"* to Mark Kostabi

Yes, I want to abandon my life as a nude
in oil on canvas, because I want more.
Don't tell me, I know, women always want more.
But it's true, I was at the beck and call,
at the whim of emperors, footmen, though
eunuchs stared at me blankly. Churchill came
only once, puffing his cigar into one big cloud.
Great strategy, I thought, but he just locked
his knees and howled one of his speeches:
Hail Caesar, while champions still grow
between dandelions and kale. Napoleon craved
dandelions in oil, he told me, secretly craved
orchids blooming between my legs, turned green
with envy at Profumo's appearance. I wasn't
a Christine Keeler; no, I was better. Her sock-it-to-him
magic had no stability whatsoever. Truly,
I need a new life as anything, a lusty dolphin
or a shapely gourd. Let me turn my belly
to vegetable love, let it trellis my trunk
with sweet seeds, let them fill me
with the bloom of a sun.

**Cover of New American Poets of the '90s.*

Here Is Another Day

“Life is a comedy to those who think,
a tragedy to those who feel.”

Horace Walpole

Is the fog holding down night
or is the night holding down fog?
You don't know.
Like the two puppies, one blond,
the other black with brown eyebrows,
still sleeping,
don't know they will be taken to the pound
later. Yesterday, no-one said
these roses are yours
because they are you,
delicate, beautiful.
Are these new art forms?
To fool you into make-believe
like ceramic doctor bags
looking as seasoned
as aged leather?
What does it all mean?
It is as if life had a flaw
that surfaces whenever it wants to.
As if the flaw had a voice
whispering
do this, do that.
As if you were skating on ice,
spinning from controls
that will have met morning
slightly behind your back
because the earth turns
because your body turns
each night toward another day.
All the balloons in the world
can't help you,
not red ribbons or roses or beer.
As surely as smoke in a tavern
settles in clothes,
your eyes mean to diminish ugliness.

You want to polish the matte kitchen floor,
say that the fog outside is leaving now,
that you take the controls
like the patient who ran away
yesterday, but her husband,
her sister held her down
for the doctor, then returned her
to the nursing home later.
You need to wake up to
a world where love walks out
and you don't know where it's gone
or if it will ever come back,
where people are expendable,
where gods dish out each day
unproportionately
a new, ugly, beautiful world.

Danielle Hanson

Self-Portrait of Brad by Danielle

I am a collector of life,
A seamstress of other's memories.
I am the Graces' favorite, who cut
their threads for my work,
the Oriental silk smell of incense.
I tried to catch one once
but he escaped, although I will never
forget the surprise on his face.
Another of the seamstresses--
an Indian woman with green eyes--
Tells me of my childhood and how
I was born in a room without mirrors.
I have never been to Madrid,
but on the second corner after the doors of
the Museum of the Dead (as you called it
although I claimed it was my diary)
there is the wall where we leaned
and watched the people, window-shopping,
before we climbed the stairs
and ate pistachios and drank aqua, no gas.
And I told you of Baltimore,
thirteenth largest city in the U.S.
But since then I have lost your face
which the Graces will surely return to me.
I will make you a veil of lace.

Metamorphosis in Rain

The rain is so fine here
It feels like little
more than air falling
through my skin into my soul,
making me shiver as I walk
hearing my shoes chanting,
"Santo, Santo, Santo," and
fearing the echo will be
"Tosan, Tosan."
The rain is making me think this.
Or the stones under my feet.
Or the people passing so fast I can feel
the death in them.
All I can remember
is the blackness of the room
And the way the incense
flicked ashes of itself onto
the bedside table.
And that time is a crab.
The similarities in the primitives
being the tie of us, the common descendants.
The identical, recurring faces,
both Mayan and Celtic,
Haunting because they are our mirrors.
Archaeology is the Tiresius of our age
Warning us away from our destiny--
the tribal slayings,
the bold sacrifices,
the dripping of the battle axes.
The blonde, blue-eyed angel of San Marco,
pigeon on her back,
wings spread, eyes raised,
warns me to run from the garden.

Lew Kirkegaard

Ode

I was desperate last night,
shotgunning coffee with the stale
hum of fluorescence hanging like the last
note of Don Giovanni in my ears, trying to work
the digestive system into my nervous system,
although even that hadn't sunk in yet.
But the epiglottis confused itself
with the pyloric sphincter, and god knows
what happened to the fundic region
when I started scraping off the shellac
of coffee clinging to my teeth.
My brother taught me the art of the "brew",
recipe #5 licked my throat with 3 parts
to 1 of Creme de Noisette with Mocha Java decaf
for the perfect buzz that nipped me like
the taste of nicotine for the first time.
We tried the half smoked ones with lipstick
that warned us of something cheap,
like the women of Baltimore, although
these belonged to Jan, the neighborhood whirlwind
of fifth grade wet dreams, things
we would only admit later in anatomy lab
when the adolescent sex jokes competed
with the professor in my mind,
who held what was left of a penis
cut for cross-sectional analysis, so you could see
the corpora spongiosum and the urethra, lifeless,
limp, not even hinting of past glories
or neighborhood moms, or lost virginity.
This is how I found myself back at the appendix,
located inferior to the cecum, not semen,
in an oblique section with its characteristic
fecal matter, shit that didn't move or dissolve,
no real purpose unless you're a cow,
or my sister, who strutted around
with her skirt pulled up to show off her 3 inch scar,
until puberty, where it lost its charm so she refused

to wear a bikini. It didn't take long
before the ascending became the descending
colon, and then the rectum and anus,
and didn't Elvis die on the toilet,
stuck between the last wilting belch and the screaming
of the external anal sphincter. Of course, you know
he's back, maybe here, flash frozen for us
because his license read "Donor",
and his family couldn't recognize him.

Robby Nichols

Sleep and Denial

If I were blind it would be worse
because she would touch me and pull at my arm,
leading me back down those long halls,
chewing gum, with her skirt smelling like sweat
and starch. Her voice, like the softest of jackhammers,

flutters against my face, spewing information
of proms, accidents, and people I don't know
or don't remember or don't want to remember.
She knows me like she knows the phone book,
and I can hear those tired questions being dragged

to the tip of her tongue, dusting off their seats
as they prepare to be hurled at me. I lie
about my life and smile as she exhales smoke in approval,
nodding as if she knows a bumper from a fender,
as if she knows how hard a baseball hits.

It's crazy the way these things begin,
having control over them like I have over
the guy at the fair to stop the Tilt-a-Whirl
when I'm green in the face and begging.
This is a painful way of recollecting.

A layer of foundation covers her face,
separated slightly from her skin, stuffing her pores,
sliding like mercury across the surface.
It blurs her image like Vaseline on a lens.
She reaches for my head like she's going to heal
me, but she just flops my hair into place,
muttering to her knuckles that I haven't changed.

When our skin touches, I realize how far
the flesh is from the bone, and I wish
I could vanish instantly to the parking lot
and ride away. She is reading old newspapers;
I recycle those, assuring their return.

Ruzha Cleaveland

The Doctor's Nose

I pull in too late to do more than lock the kitchen door, kiss Mom goodnight, and climb the stairs to my old room. Daddy had turned in after the ten o'clock newscast. Rain to Paducah made the four-hundred-mile trip seem interminable to me.

Even before leaving home I was exhausted. For three weeks I had tried to write a poem I cared about, and couldn't. I wrote faithfully everyday and got nowhere. I revised promising first drafts into dullness. Then I'd begun editing thoughts. What was I afraid of? I felt like a top rotating itself into quick sand. Often-used stimuli of doing laundry and restacking the wood pile didn't help my writing or my mood.

"Take a break. Go visit your parents," my husband had said. He was my best listener, but his job's current project was taking nights and weekends. He had no energy to help me.

Upstairs, as usual, nothing has changed. My sister's and my childhood beds are still against the room's outside wall. The light switch must be jiggled to turn on the overhead. Thirty-year-old wedding pictures flank the dresser mirror. In this room, across the hall from our parents', my sister and I had whispered night-time conversations about high school and boys, eventually college. The crickets' din puts me to sleep.

Breakfast comes later since my father retired from farming—"seventy-two and damn tired"—but he wears the same clothes as those countless mornings he left to feed cattle or for the fields: khaki shirt and pants and a pack of cigarettes in his left hand pocket. His faded zippered jacket and plaid cap with earflaps hang by the door. He reads the town's weekly newspaper while my mother serves him strong coffee with lots of milk and sugar. She drinks decaf. For whatever reason caffeine now makes her cough intractably, she who always kept a pan of boiled coffee on the stove. They still kiss and call each other honey. Her voice is soft with a residual hint of Polish learned before English, his now more rasping, never varying whether he holds toothpick or cigarette between his lips. I am more aware of his farmer's skin, permanently tanned, leather hands and lower face, the pallor of his forehead and scalp. White wrists peek from his cuffs as he reads the paper.

"Did you sleep well, honey?"

"Yes, Mom."

"How was the drive?"

"Long, Daddy. There was a wreck near Paducah that tied up traffic for almost

an hour. Radio station news is the pits late at night.”

Toast, raisin bran, orange juice, and coffee. Nothing changes. The weight of my mother’s cookbooks have made a sag in the shelf Daddy put along the wall above the door. Some day an avalanche of recipes will kill someone. I’ve told them this for years.

“How about this. Old Doc Winkler died. It says here he lived in a Sun City near Tucson.” Daddy reads us the obituary. Graduate of University of Pennsylvania, practiced in Flora, Illinois for ten years and Enid, Oklahoma for thirty. No mention of family or why he left Flora.

“Hey, let’s see. Is it still there?” My father grabs my right hand.

“Yep, it is, by golly.” He and my mother laugh. I finger the large indentation on my wrist.

A wart grew on the side of my right wrist the summer I turned six. I picked at it constantly; by winter it was dime-sized. Mom scolded me a lot and tried every method to remove it. I endured pepper under my fingernails, dilute acid drops mornings before school, and emery board sandings at night. Mom even tied a string around the wart and over time slowly tightened it.

I was convinced my wart had a core, and that if I could dig in and extract it, the wart wouldn’t grow back. Each day during first grade recess three friends and I stood behind the old bell tower at the end of the school yard. For them my wrist was rife with possibility. I loved the attention and drama. I slowly peeled off the band-aid and avidly endured each friend’s ambivalent desire to touch my wart’s rough surface. Then I’d dig at it, watching my friends’ reaction. One stood a bit away and picked her nose. One continually said “yuk” or “oooh, blood.” The third just watched, not blinking, her mouth half-open. My wart assumed demonic proportions as it blackened, cracked and scabby. My ferocity towards its extinction increased. I became a little ghoul.

My parents gave up. During Easter vacation they told me I had an appointment with the town’s new doctor to remove the wart. He would do it in his office. But I was suspicious. I didn’t know Dr. Winkler, had never been to his office. I wasn’t giving up my trophy without comment.

“My friends like looking at it,” I said. “It’s fun.

“It’s not fun when you pick at it so badly it becomes infected,” said my mother firmly.

“But I won’t have anything there; can they come watch?”

“I’m not going to argue about it.”

Only the knowledge that I would have a bandage big enough for “show and tell”

mollified me.

Doctor Winkler's waiting room boosted my spirits. There were so many magazines I'd never seen before. Pinned to the walls were colored posters of muscle groupings and the circulatory system.; there was even a skeleton standing in the corner. The nurse, mother of a friend, greeted us by name.

"So this is Sally's famous wart. Someone's had trouble ignoring it," she said, smiling at my mother. And then to me, "You'll go back to school with a wonderful, big bandage."

She led us into another room and told me to lie down on a long, narrow table covered with crackly paper. White, glossy cabinets with stainless steel knobs lined two of the walls. Below them were long counters under which were more cabinets. An unlidded toilet stood out from another wall, and with it, a washstand, mirror and paper towel dispenser. Next to, and overpowering the washstand was a tall bookcase jammed with green, blue, and red-covered textbooks. Journals stacked on top rose haphazardly to the ceiling. Another pile had begun growing nearby on the floor.

The door behind where I lay opened and closed. Dr. Winkler, in a starched white coat, strode to the sink to wash his hands, then rustled by my side. He said nothing to Mom and picked up my wrist. His hand was cold.

"This doesn't look good. You've picked it a lot. Ready to get rid of it?"

I nodded, intimidated.

"Good." He stared at me as if judging the truthfulness of my remark and then looked back over his shoulder at his nurse. "Marcella, get Thelma in here. I may need both of you. Mrs. Thomas, I want you to stay, too."

The receptionist sidled into the room and stood beside the nurse. Fluorescent lights above me made the trays of scalpels, forceps, and scissors gleam on the countertops. A long wire rack held empty glass tubes and varying lengths of syringes and needles. A tall jar of cotton balls stood near the autoclave. The glassed-in cabinets reflected opaque light like a hovering spirit wearing glasses. I looked to see that my mother was still there.

"What are you going to do?" I blurted at Dr. Winkler.

"Cut it out. Marcella, Thelma. You hold her arm, Mrs. Thomas."

No one had mentioned surgery. I stared at my mother. Her mouth smiled at me, but her eyes seemed uncertain and concerned. One hand stroked my forehead; the other gripped my left arm. The nurse and receptionist pinioned my legs. Dr. Winkler held my right wrist. All of them became avenging angels around the bed. Their heads enlarged; their bodies shrank.

"No," I screamed, "don't cut me!" Dr. Winkler had twisted slightly away from

me, loosening his grasp. I pulled my arm from him and struggled to get up. All those hands holding me down were disembodied restraining forces. My free arm was clapped harshly back to the table. A black gas mask with corrugated black tubing floated by and hovered like a bat ready to settle on my face, smother me. Dr. Winkler's face floated into view. I screamed again. The grips on my legs slid past my knees and up my thighs, the pressure firmer. Dr. Winkler leered. His mass of cheek veins curved and intersected like our country roads. The bat reappeared. Its wings fluttered as it wavered back and forth, closer and closer. Did I imagine that light shone through its thin ears, that its sharp teeth glistened? The pores on Dr. Winkler's nose became craters. The bat descended.

My next clear memory was the car ride home. How quiet it was; how quickly the grey clouds scuttered across the sky. I examined my aching, bandaged wrist. Mom seemed angry and didn't speak. I was tired when we got home, and I went to my room though it was early afternoon. The heating duct in my room connected with the one in the kitchen below. I could hear my mother's faint voice.

"Yes, she really did bite his nose. Blood spurted, and he cursed a blue streak. I didn't know what to say. I was humiliated and angry at the same time."

"What could you have said? 'Don't bite his nose, Sally.' She was terrified, and he didn't help. It's over." My father's cigarette smoke filtered up.

I knew then why the car ride home seemed so strained. I ran my tongue along the top of my mouth. There was no taste, but what should a nose taste like? Something sweaty, like my arm? Did Dr. Winkler need stitches? That possibility embarrassed me. Then I remembered that tomorrow was Sunday, and the Winklers went to the same church we did. Could I avoid seeing him the rest of my life?

The next morning I feigned illness, but my parents prevailed. And there he was, two pews ahead and half the row over. During the service I tried not to move. Once when we stood to sing, I sneaked a glance to see if his nose was swollen like my wrist. There was only a small band-aid. Afterwards I hid in the choirloft until I heard my father calling me.

Daddy is still reading the Advertiser.

"What's happening in town?" I ask.

I've been gone over twenty years, but most of the kids I went to school with are still around, as are their parents. Between my mother's newsy letters and my own subscription to the Advertiser, I know enough to be informed and stay interested. Besides, something's cooking in the back of my skull. I know the feeling. It might relate to what I've just remembered, but I can't be sure. It's best not to talk, to let things

percolate.

Mom looks at me questioningly. For years she has written an unsigned column for the town newspaper which covers everything from recipes and stories about grandchildren to town history. People mail her suggestions, stop her on the street, and begin conversations with, "Do you know about..." She is also the best amateur psychologist I know, with an intuitive understanding of what matters to people around her. Her face brightens.

"Oh! I know what I wanted to tell you. Betty Rutledge has moved back to town, into the old Gordley house across from the college. It's wonderful to see that place full of children again. Do you remember Halloweening on that street?"

"I remember waxing BOO HOO CRYBABY on the Oddfellows' Hall with Richard Royston when we were sixteen. And once Daddy and I threw eggs at the Renner's porch. By the way, Daddy, my boys don't believe you ever did that with me."

Daddy doesn't say a word but grins at the newspaper. Mom looks shocked.

"Bill, you and Sally threw eggs at the Renner's house?"

"Go get the mail," Daddy says to me, grinning nonetheless.

I'm stunned, too, but by a different revelation. The niggings in the back of my head have coalesced and come front and center.

"I'm taking a walk to town. I'll get the mail on my way," I say, then I scoot out the kitchen door.

My mile walk to town takes me past the main square. I speak to Smiles Spanley and Walter Miller sitting on a bench talking. Both are retired from the grocery store where we once shopped. Walter's son and I went through school together, and Smiles' sister worked for my grandparents for over thirty years. I continue down Main Street, past dentist's office, the Methodist Church where I married, and the house where a St. Louis newspaper reporter once lived. His wife was the town librarian and let me check out more books than allowed. This was when the library occupied one small room and was open two days a week. Now the library's a half-block edifice with a bike rack out front. Such changes come slowly, though. Like my parents' house, my home town has changed little since I left.

I turn off Main Street toward the college. Founded in 1828 by the Methodists to train preachers and teachers, it is still church-run. McKendree is a typical, small, mid-western college. Four or five buildings, including a chapel, sit at the back of a grassy, tree-filled, quad. This quad is the size of a city block, almost a park. Homes border its front and sides. The Gordley house my mother mentioned is one of those houses. My pace lengthens and becomes swifter. Quickly I cross the quad. There it is, just as I pictured

it in my flashback...the Winkler's house.

My wrist healed and stayed wartless. What remained was an innocent and smooth, dime-sized scar. And nightmares, too, amorphous, sordid images that separated into screeching bats. I woke crying. I sometimes wet my bed. My mother's hand stroked my forehead as her voice sang me back to sleep.

I never returned to Dr. Winkler's office. He told my mother that day she could take care of any necessary rebandaging. He didn't want to see me again. I wonder if he held a rag to his nose as he spoke to her? Now I can laugh at my audacity. I forgot my nightmares, but I never forgot Dr. Winkler, especially after I encountered him the next Halloween.

When Dr. Winkler married Mary Chamberlain the town must have buzzed. She was a woman ahead of her time: aggressively smart, willing to challenge conventional wisdom, ready to take chances. Such people always make small towns sit up and take notice. And, not the least of it in our house she'd had a crush on my father when she was a teenager. My parents liked Mary. My father told me she pestered him to take her for rides on his motorcycle; my mother said she voiced her opinions. Mary's parents lived in a house bordering the college quad. When Mary and Dr. Winkler married, they moved into a house across the quad from her parents.

My second grade Halloween was my first. I wanted to trick or treat, and my parents allowed me to go with friends if we stuck to a planned route and had older brothers and sisters with us. They thought my sister and brother too young to go. I was elated and pranced around the kitchen in my good fairy costume waving a wand made from a coat hanger and aluminum foil.

It was dark when our little group set out. Street lights glowed dull yellow, giving our expedition an aura of mystery, or so I thought. Other ghostly groups passed us on the sidewalks, and my sack got full and heavy. Mrs. Gordley had just dropped in over-sized chocolate chip cookies, and I paused to retrieve one.

"Come on," said a friend, "you can eat that at my house. We have this last street to go.

"Go ahead. I have to go to the bathroom, too." I lurched toward a large boxwood next to the porch in the yard we just passed.

"Okay. Hurry and catch up with us."

I had pulled up my pants and was rearranging my tutu when I heard shouts and screams coming from inside the house. I retrieved my sack and stepped around the bush toward the front sidewalk. The shouts got louder. A female voice distinguished itself,

and she sounded in trouble. I looked for my friends, or any Halloween group to join; I didn't want to be alone. Then the front door opened, and the screen door slammed against the house. Out ran a naked woman. I'd never seen an adult unclothed and was embarrassed. I didn't want to look at her, nor did I want her to see me. I quickly returned to the boxwood's shadows. She stopped abruptly in the middle of the porch and turned back to the door.

"You son of a bitch. You try any more of that crazy stuff with me and I'll tell everybody in town what a drunken fool you are. Then see what kind of surgery you'll get." It was a cool fall night, and her arms were folded across her chest. Her legs quivered; goose pimples stood all over her flesh. Her long brown hair crossed one eye, and some had caught in her mouth. She raised one hand to pull it away. Mary Winkler! Someone I knew was outside her house without any clothes on. What would my parents do to me if they knew this? I raised a hand to my mouth.

"Don't you come near me!" She doubled her fists and backed toward the porch steps.

Dr. Winkler lunged out the door holding a butcher knife in one hand. His undershirt had pulled out of his pants and partially covered some suspenders that hung in an arc on his thighs.

"Daughter of a bitch you are," he said. His low voice enunciated each word. He lifted the knife above his head. It wavered as he walked erratically toward her.

Of course I didn't understand the complexity of what I saw. I was seven, an inadvertent witness to marital drama rarely seen these days, too, in public, and my parents' relationship was far different. I was terribly frightened. An old nemesis wielded a knife, a big one this time. What would he do if he saw me? What would Mary do? I pressed further into the boxwood.

Mary's eyes narrowed, and she threw out her chin as if making a decision. She turned, leaped off the porch not three feet from where I hid, and ran across the street toward the campus quad, her shadow chasing her and then non-existent. Dr. Winkler stumbled down the steps after her, brandishing the knife and yelling, "Bitch, bitch." He, too, disappeared from the street light's silent watch and vanished among the oaks.

The shouting and footsteps ceased. Gone, too, were the friendly sounds of trick-or-treat groups. I sat back to rub a foot that had fallen asleep. Some of my hair had tangled in the bush, and I removed twigs and small leaves. Houses around me seemed larger with their lights off, and I felt deserted and alone. The night was so still. I shivered. My fairy costume was no longer impervious to the autumn evening and its subtle coolness. Hoping to see porch lights or a mailbox with a name on it, I stood and limped to the sidewalk. My

parents would worry if my group arrived at the last house and I wasn't with them. Houselights beacons at the end of the street, and I began walking toward them. I opened my trick or treat bag, hoping candy would make me feel better.

A person stood before me on the sidewalk, and I froze. Dr. Winkler, and one hand still gripped the butcher knife which hung at his side. I stared at his nose. I could hear the squeak of bats and smell ether.

"Where did you come from?" he said.

"I'm trick-or-treating."

"Who with?"

"My friends."

"Where are they?"

"They went ahead. I had to go to the bathroom."

He stared at me. Nervous, I looked at the knife and then at my tutu. Boxwood twigs stuck in its crumpled netting, and my tights were grass-stained.

"Where did you pee?"

"Behind that bush." I pointed to the boxwood next to his porch. There was another long pause.

"What did you see?"

"Mary...and you." I whispered, not wanting to tell the truth but believing I shouldn't lie either. I could barely hear my voice.

"What? You saw what?" His voice raised and intensified.

"I saw you and Mary."

"No, you saw nothing, and you'll say nothing. If you do, I swear to God, I'll find you and cut off your arm. Do you hear me?" He was talking to me the same way he talked to Mary, slowly and clearly. Then he pushed past me and up his front walk.

I ran. I ran to shut out bats and ether. I ran to obliterate the sharp vision of the knife. But most of all, I ran toward the light, light that would show me where to go, who to believe, what was safe.

At the end of the street I saw my parents' car parked in front of the lighted house. They had to be inside. They would hold me, comfort me. I clambered up the porch; my Halloween bag bumped on each step. I was crying and tried to wipe my eyes and runny nose on my tutu as I pushed through the door. Mom's face divided itself from a startled mass of flesh, and she held me.

"Did you think you were lost, honey? You weren't." She smiled, pushing hair away from my wet face. "We were just leaving to find you. Daddy and I would never lose you."

I don't remember what I told them—a simple tale of fright I'm sure—Dr. Winkler's threat intimidated me too much to tell them the truth.

The boxwood is still here, although now others follow the porch line. A railing edges the steps; the porch is now screened. The Winkler house is painted Williamsburg blue; it looks cared for.

Small town gossip can travel as quickly as Mary Winkler ran that night. Neighbors who watched her cross the quad to her parents' house said Dr. Winkler didn't follow her very far. Did he fear Mary's anger, or her parents'? Maybe the thought of scandal and his practice stopped him. Maybe Mary was too quick. Who knows why? Of course they divorced. She left to visit a sister in Italy and thereafter seldom returned. His practice drifted away, and a year later he moved to Oklahoma, presumably to begin again. Mary's mother grocery-shopped in a neighboring town until people in Flora began talking about other things.

My memories and musings are cut short; I promised my father I'd pick up the mail. I turn away from the Winkler house, then, abruptly, leave the sidewalk, cross the quiet street, and walk into the quad. It is peaceful and shady, perfect for a nap or summer picnic. The academic year ends soon, and students lie on blankets or are propped against trees with open books. The grass crunches under my feet; Flora's farmers must need rain. I look back at the Winkler house. A woman sweeps the porch. This must be the way Mary ran that Halloween evening, followed by Dr. Winkler. I turn, trying to locate her parents' house through the trees. How did she find her way in the dark to arrive safely at her parents' house?

When our younger son was two, he chopped off the end of his index finger sticking it into a whirring blender. He'd been watching me make bread crumbs. I had turned off the machine to check his crying brother. Louder screams brought me back to the kitchen. I don't know how I curbed my panic enough to get us to the emergency room, though our older child kept repeating, "Stop, Mommy; stop driving so fast."

The night whirrs, runs lightly past this tree that hides me. Something squeaks. Each afternoon descends, marches down to a smell of brimstone...

I stop walking.

Why do I picture Ichabod Crane? That Walt Disney classic was my least favorite childhood movie. A few months ago it appeared on television. When the headless

horseman chase scene started, I turned off the set. The knife always frightened me, and the billowing black cape. I think it was lined with red or orange, a true Hell. When I visited my grandparents in Arizona I watched slag from the copper mine dumped down the mountain at night across the valley from their house.

The night's never the same. Sometimes it whirrs, runs
lightly, past this tree. I hide. A headless horseman
chases Ichabod, cape billowing black and red.
His blade flashes. The night can descend like a head.
All smells of brimstone, like copper company slag
dumped at midnight on the mountain top. Down
the slag slides, yellow-orange lights the valley,
darkens dull red, slows as if withheld, finally congealed.
Cold, colorless, hiding. By daybreak it never was.

Memory. So much stays with us. I look toward Mary Winkler's parents' house,
or where I think it was. Was a porch lit that night?

Terry Olsen

I Want Mick Jagger's Lips

Why couldn't the word come out
be pushed out. It was just a simple word
made of some smeary, black ink but
it felt like a pair of hands choking my neck
and I just stood paralyzed by this word
that made me sweat and hate myself. All of me
froze except my lips which formed a fountain
and my mouth was the water's source and my lips
directed the water mostly down my chin.
But after apologies
after laughs
after "why me?" the word came out
and another came and another
until I couldn't stop the flow because
I was singing and not talking. I wanted to talk
but like always singing was my way
the only way to get anything out.
As my singing went on and on
my head buzzed with frustration.
Angry that was me and I hated everything—
my buzzing, my singing and most of all the people
people who laughed and then looked confused
and then smiled and then still laughed under their smiles.

Betsy O'Shee

Pueblo (after Kumin, "Stones")

The shifting of houses, this subtle elbowing push
of daylight dances, edges exposed.

They rise from the earth like flowers. They unfold
their stems and petals, supplicating them to the sun

unassisted, knowing their way on their own
like unschooled children at play. In this way a village is born.

Sightless and silent, they act
in the manner of houses: shelter occupants, shift ground

rising up in adobe wonder into walls and from moment
to moment resemble dreaming mushrooms of the plains.

The gates of my village are guarded by old houses
And to see the stout herd of them elbowing forth

as gruffly as overgrown adults in
a pretense of anger is to believe for a moment

in objects that shimmer and quaver
in some silent and knowing manner.

John Cornwell

Sigmund Freud

When speaking
a written word
impulses first travel
from the occipital lobe
to Wernicke's area
past the Angular Gyrus

*As a child my
fondest memory revolves
around a Christmas*

The impulses then
travel across the
Arcuate Fasciculus
and Motor Cortex to
Broca's area

*I got a pen
you know the kind
with a refillable
reservoir in the end
it was the one
thing in the world I
wanted most*

Although
these areas
of the brain
are defined
they are not finite

5,200 items are "lost"
on flights out of
Washington D.C.
every three weeks

From Broca's area

impulses are sent to
the motor cortex
to control the
correct speech muscles

*I've never been
to Friendsville Maryland
in October with
leaves alive staining
mountains bright
yellow and orange*

These items are sold
in unclaimed baggage
stores at selected locations
around our nation

*With this pen
I could write
a pathway into
the stars outside
my bedroom window*

communication between
the areas of Wernicke and
Broca is important
in the interpretation
of a sign as a significant
linguistic unit

*with the next
White Russian
I can ease out
of myself and into
the \$10 hotel across
from the bar with
the drunk beside me*

*With the leftover
impulses scattered through
my brain from
our conversation*

*I could create
an image of my
uncle on top
of Franzozich
it must have been Christmas*

Ich bin mute

At times areas
of the brain
are preferential
to impulses they
will receive this
usually arises from
a cerebral injury

At night when
I write this poem
I can't hear myself
screaming

Jenn Brown

This is the liar's art

1

Here's a picture of my grandfather, bending
over his child, my mother, revealing
the bald spot he'd like to deny.
And why shouldn't he?
The photo is a compulsive liar, honestly;
it is surgery at the moment of incision, the blast
of a shotgun as the pellets scatter,
the glow left on the eye when the lamp
is turned off. Where are the hands,
the fists, the jerky circlings of the seconds?
If only he'd looked up at the camera,
invulnerable, the photograph would give back
proof of his startling youth.
In this one of me, age three, the waves have frozen
in swirls around the pier's pilings,
and I am smiling
as the sand underneath me is pulled away with the tide.

2

I am smiling as the sand underneath me
is pulled away with the tide; on either side of me
the dark legs of the pier stretch
across the living web of ocean
without really holding it, or anything
down. There is the camera and
the young bearded man who holds it, and
in that moment when I look straight at him—
it is almost evening, the light is good;
up and down the beach, umbrellas are closing
and parents are calling to their children.
Though I can't see it,
there is the frame

of wood and water that repeats
back and back, until it is smaller even
than the eye of the camera, and
is lost in the white fingers of spray.

3

The waves have frozen in swirls around the pier's pilings;
the child, too, is still, and nothing
presents itself unwelcome
in the foreground: not someone else's child,
bathing suit drooping, not even an errant
insect on the lens. She is quieter
than usual; she spent most of the day
with two children who are leaving
in the morning. But she is only three,
and she's already forgotten their names.
The mother doesn't move closer
or run to put her arms around the child
in the waves in this moment when
father and daughter meet
in the eye of the lens
before it winks benignly.

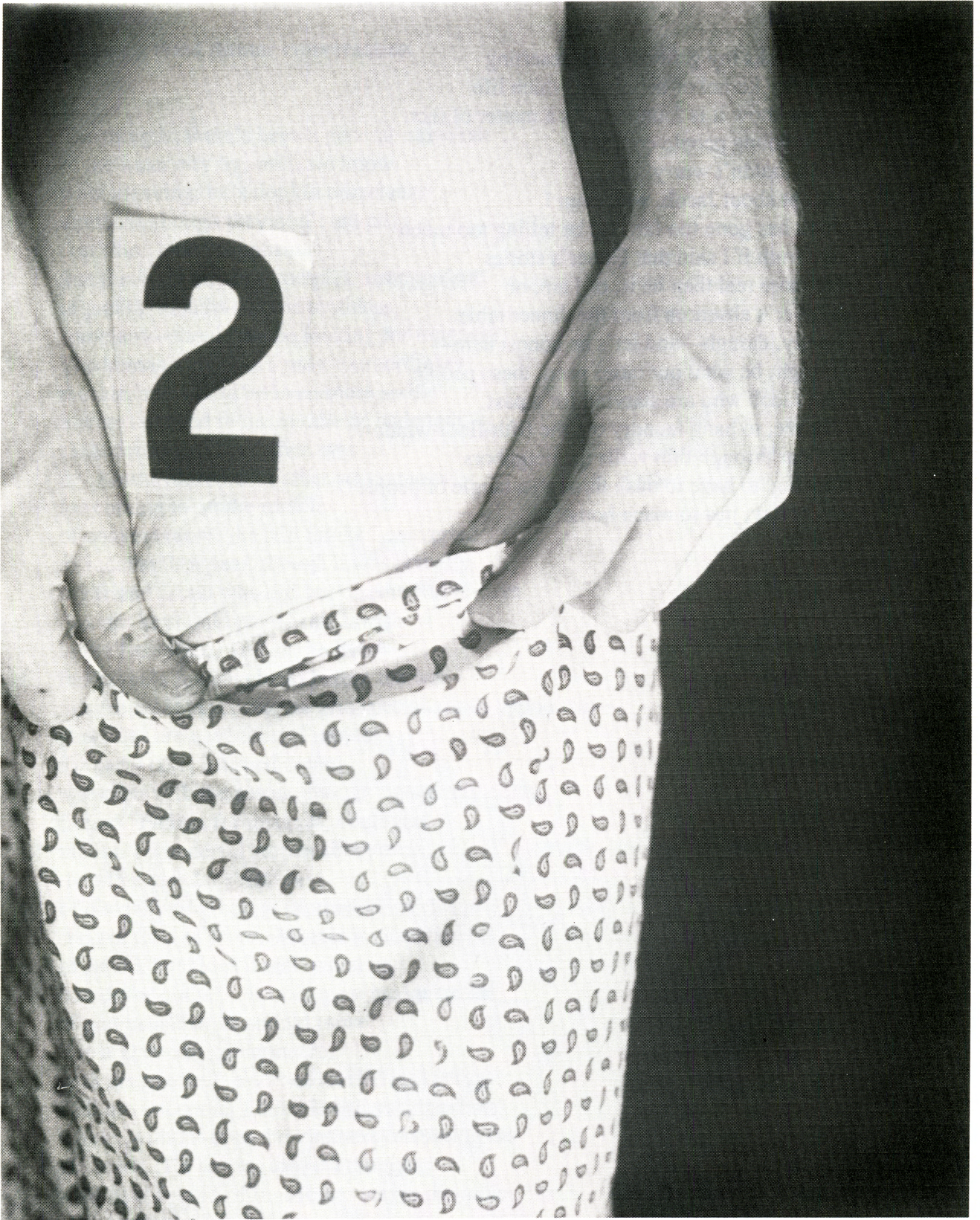
4

The jerky circlings of the seconds keep us moving
as if time were a carousel, as if the sun setting
into the Atlantic just out of a child's reach
were the brass ring for another ride. She doesn't know
that her mother's watch and the sun have anything
in common; that she has entered
the amusement park already; that one day
she, too, will keep photo albums, mark
her days off a calendar and wish
quietly, but with the voice of the world,
to return to her childhood—
as if stopping
the clock would somehow keep us small,
and loved, and comforted.

Not very good dinner conversation

The thing is, there's been a general move out of the inner city by, well, we know who's leaving, let's not kid ourselves; numbers, though they don't tell all, don't lie. Now, supposing that the inner city is a complex arrangement of gaping mouths—some toothless, some not—should we be looking for tongues? The human tongue is a most extraordinary muscle, and would be even more so if it were attached in the middle of its length, as, according to my father, was my Aunt Mildred's. Father was famous for coming in on the middle of conversations: he still thinks I converted to Judaism last year, though it was actually my friend Jacob who did because he had always thought he should have been Jewish in the first place. In fact, he lived in Prague's Jewish ghetto before the war—this from his psychologist who specializes in hypnotism—past lives are a wonderful subject for party talk. I turned down a session with the shrink, though I generally enjoy fiction. Father, for instance, could tell the most wonderful stories about even the most mundane details of his daily life though Mother claimed she got tired of them. Mother is suspicious of Jacob, but hides it well when he comes for dinner. Jacob's most recent stroke of genius is that he should move into a ghetto to get in touch with his past self; a sort of karmic reckoning. Call me a sceptic: I think it will swallow him whole, without even the kindness of spitting out the seeds. I'd say so, too, if I thought he'd hear a word of it. Mother leaves the table every time she hears the word 'karma'.

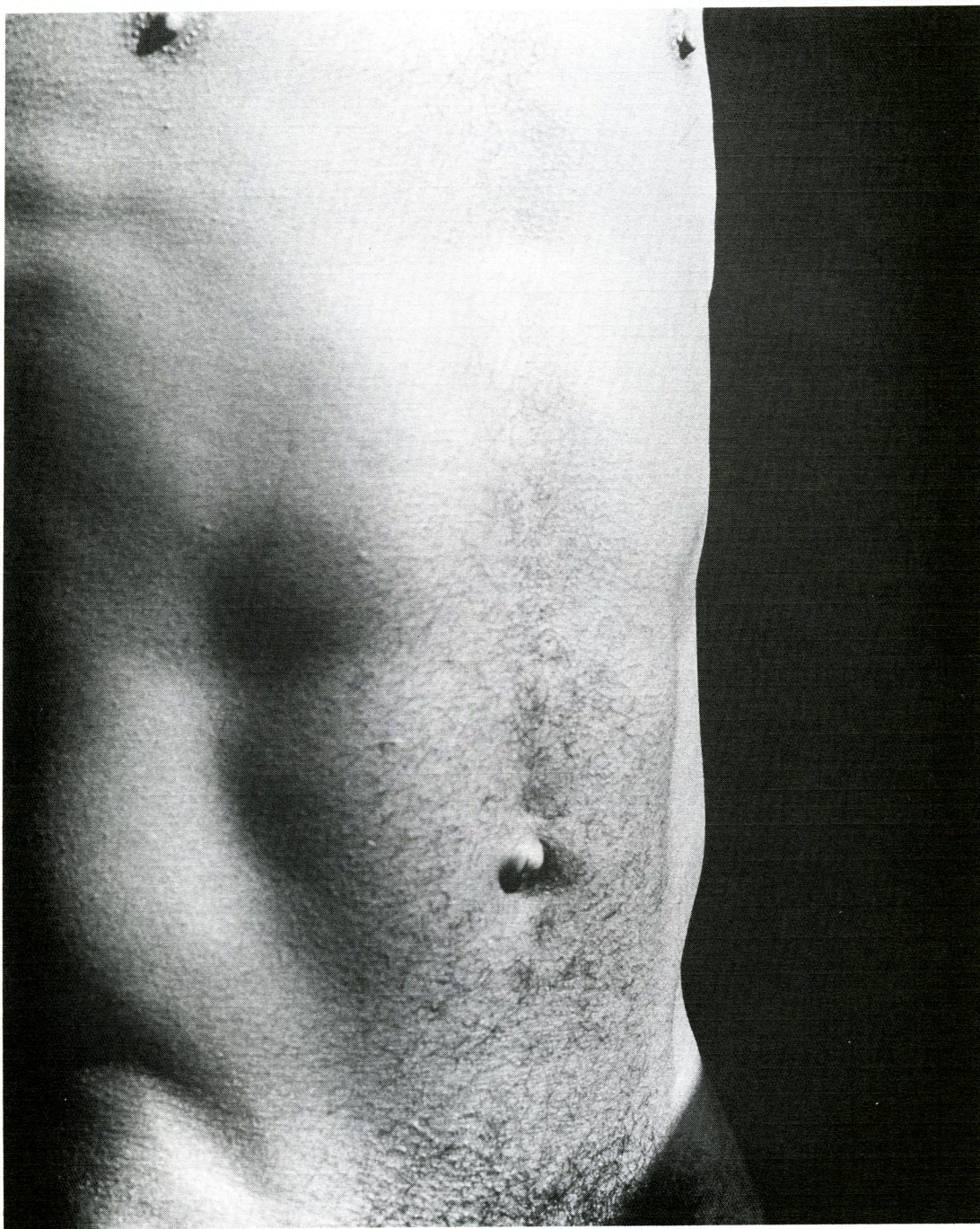
She thinks my generation is deserting
the very kernel of beliefs on which life
as we know it is founded. As a matter of fact,
most young people conform,
she shouldn't worry
except about Jacob, who even I
think has gone too far. I'd be telling too much
of a truth if I said that Father's stories
are more real than he is, or I am, or
Mother's absences from the dinner table.
Really, though—and let's be honest here—
it might be what our cities need, these people
like Jacob who are starving for a past,
like me, to hang laundry out the fifth-floor window,
to hear through thin walls the neighbors
fucking, to have to push through a tangle of people
every day, just to reach home.



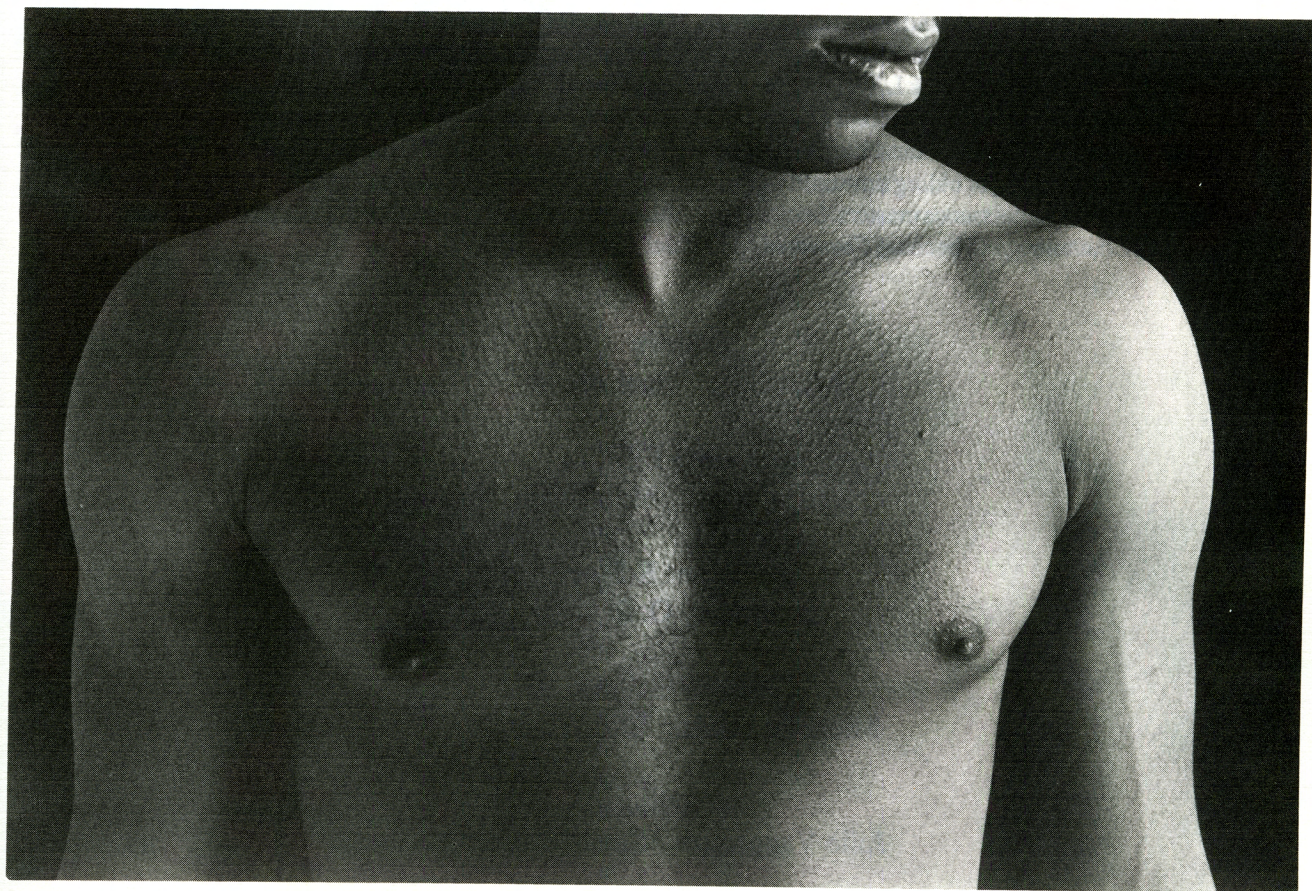
Jon Brumit



Jon Brumit



Terry Harwood



Terry Harwood

Contributors

Ted Howard is a junior Humanities major planning the violent overthrow of the SGA in the near future. **John Cornwell** is a junior Humanities major with a death wish, trendy rafting clothes, and that distinctive raft guide aura. **Gabriel Behringer** is an Undecided major by day, dessert girl at Perry's by night. Congratulations to **Victoria Raschke**, sophomore Humanities major, who's funding her upcoming jaunt in Slovenia with a much deserved Provost Research Grant. **Bradley O. Paul** purports himself to be a sophomore English major, but we suspect it's all a front for his playboy lifestyle. **Helga Kidder** graduated honorably in December and is pursuing graduate studies in poetry and bartending. "Babyface" **Terry Olsen** masterminds U.T.C.'s cough-drop racket, cleverly disguised as a freshmen English major. **Lew Kirkegaard**, no relation, is a Biology major, who goes to bed earlier than any college student we've ever met. **Danielle Hanson** is a sophomore Math major; she made a great show at Mardi Gras and brought back many beads. **Michael Kim** is really a senior Chemistry major but insists on dabbling in subjects beyond his ken. Philosophy major **Robby Nichols** is busy re-landscaping his backyard to prepare for his moto-cross career. **Betsy O'Shee** is quitting school to follow Wilson Phillips on their southeast tour. **Jon Brumit** is drummer for Boondoggle and recycling madman. "CAP-God" **Craig Combs**, photo editor for the *Echo*, is now offering his services for weddings and proms. **Terry Harwood** has moved to Chicago in order to remove the "atrocities of Frank L. Wright" from the face of the planet. **Denise Frank** is a graduate student in English whose upcoming *The Lost Diaries of Mr and Mrs. Fat* will be available in hardback this fall. Graduate poet **Ruzha Cleaveland** keeps us all on our toes by mastering all the genres. **Kelly McGowen** is an Art Education major biding time until the prize money comes. **John Van Eyk** carries on the tradition of great northern Renaissance masters. Senior Humanities major **Jenn Brown** is leaving her post as literary mogul of Chattanooga to become *Cosmopolitan's* chief Astrology editor.

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